

THE DARK SIDE OF BILDUNG?

Language, history, and religion in Friedrich Schlegel's *Über Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*

Floris Solleveld

1. Introduction

Friedrich Schlegel *loved words*. True, he did not know as many languages as Bopp or Humboldt; but those were true comparative linguists. Schlegel's love was different: he did not show any interest in languages without a literary canon. He concerned himself with literature in every possible way: as a leading critic, he did a lot to establish a 'literary field' and the position of criticism in it; he more or less founded the Romantic circle, which included Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schelling and his own brother August Wilhelm; he edited *Athenäum*, the movement's organ, and filled it; he lectured on literary history, which did not then exist as an academic discipline; his first book was a work *Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie*; he learned Persian and Sanskrit. In fact, he was one of the first Germans to know Sanskrit, and the first to learn it in Europe. *Über Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* was a pioneer work; it gave the first generation of academic linguists its method, and set a score of linguists to the study of the Indian canon. But it was not an 'academic' work, and Schlegel himself never was a university linguist or philologist. William Jones, fifteen years before Schlegel, had been the first to suggest that Sanskrit, Greek and the Romance and Germanic tongues were of one distinct language family; Schlegel's grand contribution had been to define this family in terms of inflection, and to connect these different languages historically through the structural comparison of 'roots'. He gave examples of how such comparisons should be made; but he did not set himself to the task of making them systematic, compiling grammar lists and vocabularies. After the publication of *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, when he finally got a lasting university appointment in Vienna, he lectured on philosophy and literature.

Schlegel's original plan had been to present an 'Indian Chrestomathy', with Sanskrit text and paraphrase, a grammar and a lexicon; in short, an Indian primer. This scheme failed because he could not find funds to have a Sanskrit type cut. 'Und so mußte ich mich denn fürs erste darauf beschränken, durch den gegenwärtigen Versuch nur einen Beweis mehr zu liefern, wie fruchtbar das Indische Studium *dereinst noch werden könne*, die Überzeugung weiter zu verbreiten, welche reiche Schätze hier verborgen seien'.¹ So instead, he wrote a book *about* the Indian language and lore, together with some speculations on its origins and the relevance of studying it, and a set of translations from the Sanskrit canon (Ramayon, Monu, Bhagavad-Gita, and Mahabharata). It consists of four parts of roughly equal length: On language; On philosophy; Historical ideas; and Indian poems. In the

¹ *Über Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, in: Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, Band VIII: Studien zur Philosophie und Theologie, ed. Ernst Behler & Ursula Stuck-Oppenberg, Schöningh, Paderborn 1975, pp. 105-433; *Vorrede*, p. 109. My italics. Volumes of the Kritische Ausgabe will further be referred to as KA.

foreword, Schlegel mentions explicitly ‘die Altertumsforscher... und die Freunde der Poesie’² – that is, a professional and a wider educated audience. Despite his snobbery of giving Persian words in Arab type without transcription (how many people could read that in Germany at the time? one thousand?) the people he addresses are the *gebildeten Stände* at large.³ The book is meant, first of all, to invite private study.

But the ambition is far greater. Schlegel’s first sketch of comparative linguistics tries to connect between ancient lore and the present, to place western civilization in a new perspective. In the same foreword, he refers to the historical impact of Greek studies, and expresses the hope that Indian studies will have a similar impact. Schlegel’s ambition, therefore, can be summarized as to stir a *second Renaissance*.

The effect was not quite that. The book had its merits as an Indian primer: it inspired a generation of romantic philologists to learn Sanskrit. It was also hugely important for the emergence of linguistics as a discipline, although as a work of research it was quickly superseded. But Schlegel’s ‘historical ideas’ worked out less favourably. In Schlegel’s view, the Indo-European languages were categorically different from all others: they were *inflected*, whereas all other languages were *agglutinative* or *isolating*. That is, whereas other languages simply fixed ever more affixes to the roots, or set each syllable apart, the Indo-European languages made distinctions by transforming (inflecting) the root. These inflected languages, in Schlegel’s view, were *organic* and *spiritual* whereas others were merely *mechanical*, and the spread of this higher type of language around the globe should be explained as the achievement of a great warrior tribe. There are some weaknesses to this theory – Semitic languages also have an inflected structure, and the distinction is not all that categorical – but this did not prevent it from contributing to what Léon Polyakov called ‘the Aryan Myth’.

Not that Schlegel intended to spread racist ideas. His concern is for language, not for the hierarchy of peoples; he speaks with great respect of the Chinese civilization and the Hebrew heritage, and he was married to Moses Mendelssohn’s daughter Dorothea. But his intentions were bad enough. By the time he published *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, Schlegel had lost faith in the ideals of the French revolution; and in the same year (1808) he converted to Catholicism. What, then, was he looking for in Indian lore? Like all romantic indophiles, he was in search of revelation: India for him is the key to spiritual regeneration, and his second Renaissance is a spiritual Renaissance. But he is not in search of Nirvana or something – nor for a ‘popular spirit’, for that matter. For him, the whole of ancient Indian wisdom is a variety of *misunderstood Christian* revelations, and since India, for Schlegel, is the cradle of civilization, the study of its language and wisdom leads civilization back to its spiritual origins. Schlegel’s second Renaissance, then, amounts to a return to medieval times.

² idem, p. 107

³ Translations by Schlegel’s hand were prepublished in the *Morgenblatt für die gebildeten Stände*. See the introduction to *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, p. CXCVIII

2. Knowledge, morals, and ideals

All that is a wild bunch of ideals at work in one man's mind. *Über Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* is not a great work of philosophy, but it is interesting as an example of how ideals work out. Schlegel redefines the meaning of *philology*: not so much by pointing out a different tradition as by pointing to the *historical development of language* and the edifying effects of its study. (People had known that language had a history before; but for Schlegel it had a life of its own.) Extending the field of knowledge for the sake of moral education – very much an enlightened, humanistic, cosmopolitan ideal. So far, Schlegel represents the ideal of *Bildung* at its best. But his particular programme of moral education does not work out favourably for Indian wisdom: all Indian philosophies are merely ways of failing to be Christian. Schlegel's ideals, then, also tend to distort his view. Now this is not a simple case of dogmatism: Schlegel was not a dim-witted, prejudiced Catholic dogmatic, but a sharp critical mind with a pioneer spirit. He was very well aware of what was going on in philosophy, and as he perceived it, it had run dead; and so had Romanticism. Hence into the incense. In a sense, conversion was his way of keeping up with the times. (1808, after all, was also the year of the *Concordat*.)

What, then, is the role that ideals play in this work? He had set himself to the study of languages in order to devise a new mythology to the spirit of Art – 'Im Orient müssen wir das höchste Romantische suchen', he wrote in his *Rede über die Mythologie*.⁴ But then he was not simply *prompted* by romantic ideals, he was also seeking to *define* them, and what he came up with was something quite different. We can say the same of other ideals: *Bildung*, the Enlightenment, Nationalism and religious ideals are not the 'hidden machinery' in Schlegel's mind, they are at stake. Whatever influence they have on Schlegel's thought, they leave the outcome undetermined; and equally, these ideals are not givens. Ideals are vague things, that relate to an even vaguer 'ideal state of affairs' which does not exist for the time being. Their definition is as unclear as their outcome. Worse, it is not only open what specific ideals *are* and *mean*; it is hard to say what we may call an 'ideal', and how to distinguish one ideal from another, or from two.

This is not the opportunity to fly far into this void. My particular concern in this essay is with the ideal of *Bildung*: how it operates in the massive change in science and education around 1800, how it is active in the emergence of linguistics, how it relates to the concern with language and history, and what can grow from it. Schlegel's text is an *outcrop* of the ideal of *Bildung*, but it also part of its *definition*, in so far as it represents a new way of speech including language and history, and a new system of science and knowledge. And, as suggested above, it might well be that the ideal of *Bildung* not only clears but also distorts his view, that the moralization of knowledge not only fails to prohibit but even promotes prejudice, that we can't simply blame it on the Catholic disease and that's that.

⁴ This speech is part of the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, and the character who delivers it has strong traits of Schelling. In those days the relationship between the two had not got complicated. KA II: Charakteristiken und Kritiken I, ed. Ernst Behler, Schöningh, Paderborn 1967, pp. 284-361; p. 320

In extension, the problem is not so much Who corrupted Germany? or Is Bildung rotten at the core? as it is What is the role of ideals in systems of knowledge, and concept formation? Obviously, our ideals are based upon or knowledge of the world – but also upon our ignorance of it, and some conception of how it should be. (Ideals, after all, are not really ‘real’, they refer to the unknown future, to states of affairs that we can’t quite squeeze into propositions.) I doubt we would have ideals if we were omniscient. It goes without dispute that systems of human knowledge are neither exhaustive nor stable, and it is perfectly liable to say that they are kept together by norms and imperatives. Do ideals, then, fill the gaps and stitch the limbs together, for better or worse, like the moon needs a dark side to make it round? This is not a rhetorical question. First, because most of us are as unwilling to be called ‘idealists’ as we are to be without ideals; and second, because we do not really know what ideals *are*, or might be.

For making out the workings of one particular ideal, Schlegel’s *Über Sprache und Weisheit* is good case in point because it contains so many of the concerns and convictions that are roughly grouped under the label ‘Bildung’. Yet there are two maverick elements. First, there is India. Schlegel was not the only figure in the history of Bildung who looked eastward, but still it is a disruptive element in the love affair between Germany and Greece. As a redefinition of humanistic ideals, the Bildung revolution encompassed a new way of looking at antiquity, the best of Man’s youth rather than the realm of eternal standards. This hellenomania was already complicated by the Romantics’ rediscovery of the Middle Ages, but the Romantics were against classicism rather than against antiquity. India – as Schlegel sees it - presents a greater challenge: *there*, at least, is the spirituality that Greek philosophy is so spitefully lacking. Ten years later, with Schopenhauer, matters got worse.

The second maverick element is divine provision. This is not Schlegel’s private hobby-horse; both Bildung and Romanticism have it in them. Authors that stand for either share the idea that the ‘true liberation’ of man is in self-realization, in existence according to man’s ‘true nature’ and the pursuit of one’s own self. (This latter point is more a matter of dispute.) With this task, man is placed in a world that has some kind of Grand Design. There are virtually no atheists in these movements – but not many strong believers either. Most of the thinkers of the period adopt some kind of Pietism or Deism, or conceive of provision as a ‘regulative idea’. Schlegel’s conversion might be a variant of this belief in provision, but it was a quite eccentric thing to do all the same. Still, to think of history in spiritual terms was not: even if this was the period when people ‘discovered history’, it was not historical contingency but rather history with a spirit of its own they discovered.

History, in the ideal of Bildung, is not the plain course of events but a teleological scheme. The histories that were constructed on that basis – Schlegel’s *Vorlesungen über die Universalgeschichte* and its likes – may not have a large appeal anymore but the idea that history has an imperative force is not so easy to shove aside. Similarly, the concern with language (‘language and history’ tend to go together in the characteristics of Bildung) is not the innocent love of words. As Michel Foucault

chooses to see it, the period brings a massive shift in the system of signs: words are no longer linked to objects in a scheme of representations, but to the actions of the unifying subject.⁵ Language, in Humboldt's words, is not a thing but an organism, not an *ergon* but an *energeia*. Whatever we may think of Foucault's analysis, the fact is that language and *action* (expression, sound, language use, history, life) get linked rather more closely in the mid-century around 1800. The concern with language was conceived to be of moral consequence. Such moral consequences, as with history, concerned self-realization and harmony with one's own nature; they also concerned, with that, the national spirit as part of it.

If we want to make sense of *Über Sprache und Weisheit* as an outcrop of the Bildung ideal, we must first have some understanding of what the period's 'discovery' of language and history amounts to. Since SW is a work of linguistics, this means tracing back the relationship between Bildung and linguistics somewhat beyond 1800; and since it is a work of philology, this also means asking *why* this collective love of words, and particularly Greek words, grew among German intellectuals of the time. For the present, I have nothing better to offer than some textbook history. Since Schlegel, as a critic, contributed quite a bit to the construction of this textbook history, at least it will help understanding the author at his own terms. But it gives all the more reason to regard it with suspicions.

3. A short history of Bildung and language

A good deal of the German philosophical lexicon was developed by late medieval mystics, and *Bildung* is no exception. According to Rudolf Vierhaus, the substantive occurs with the earliest written German as a loan translation for *imago*, *imitatio*, *forma*, *formatio*; Notker of St. Gall used it to denote the cardinal virtue of *imaginatio*. Only with Tauler and Seuse, however, the word acquired its metaphorical sense of *personal formation*, giving shape to one's human talents, discovering the depth of one's soul, *imitatio Christi*. For them, it was a key concept.⁶ This is relevant because it makes all the more clear that the notion of Bildung does not originate with *secular* individualism, but with individualism all the same. Its origins are not quite secular, but not quite canonical either. And this little history of translation and creative use also hints at some special role for language.

Still, over a distance of four centuries, this particular use is of little consequence. Mysticism's appeal to the individual religious experience may not be all that different in content from 18th-century pietism, but it does not give a clue to the concerns of the 18th and early 19th century. The Bildung ideal is a conspicuously *modern* phenomenon: in its appeal for general education, academic freedom and the emancipation of the People, it is unthinkable without modern science and the Enlightenment. Moreover, we should not think of Bildung as an ethereal entity, germinating in German heads; by the time

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses. Une Archéologie des Sciences Humaines*, Gallimard, Paris 1966, chapter 8.iv.

⁶ Lemma 'Bildung' in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Alois Brunner, Werner Conze & Reinhart Koselleck, Band I, Stuttgart 1972, 508-51; p. 509-10

of Friedrich Schlegel, the ideal of Bildung had become an active social force, changing the whole system of education, the state that fed it and the knowledge that was produced in it. Bildung, perhaps, has as much to do with institutions as it has with philosophy. At least, it has very much to do with the role that philosophy performs *within* institutions.

Part of the background, for instance, is provided by the reformation and its educational impact. For the northern humanists, language study was a way of subverting the Roman Catholic authority, and so the humanistic gymnasia from the 16th century onward laid an immense emphasis on the study of Greek as well as Latin, not from philological but from theological interest. The study of Hebrew, and even Orientalism, profited from the same religious motives. But even with the emphasis on the individual soul, the motive behind it was not quite liberation. The reformation left the scholastic structure of the German universities largely intact, and it worked out none too favourably for the independence of philosophy. In so far as Bildung only became an active force when philosophy came to a position of dominance, its history does not get back far beyond 1700.⁷

The philosophy of Leibniz is a good starting point, if we need one. His individualism – every human being is a monad that mirrors the universe, and develops out of itself according to some pre-established harmony – equates reason and knowledge with an impulse for self-development, whereas the logical principles that he saw behind his monadology – noncontradiction, sufficient and necessary reason, and the idea that *nihil est sine ratione* – warranted his interest in meanings and language. Leibniz fitted all knowledge to a moral scheme: since nothing is without reason, understanding the world means knowing the good, knowing why this world is the best of all possible worlds.⁸ Thus, both his development of differential calculus and his Chinese studies were part of that scheme. What he was looking for in Chinese was a *universal language*, one that would denote all monadic concepts unambiguously. For Foucault, this pursuit of universal language belonged to a world-view radically different from Schlegel's with regard to the sign; but it can be argued that there is already a notion of organic development in monadology, even if this does not apply to language as such.

Leibniz did not bother to put his philosophy into a coherent work, or to teach it. Like all the great scientists of his day, he was not a university professor; the university, at that time, taught medicine, law and theology, and did not promote research. 'Philosophy' was the name of the 'lower faculty', where the general programme was taught. (Science, meanwhile, went on at societies and academies – Leibniz himself founded those at Vienna and Berlin.) Still Leibniz's ideas found their way to the university, when Wolff stuffed them into his philosophy textbooks. Nowadays, Wolff's philosophy is

⁷ Not a bad moment: this is when Leibniz founded the Berlin *Société des Sciences et Belles-Lettres*, later the Berlin Academy. It differed from its London and Paris models in its large role for the humanities.

⁸ For a discussion of Leibniz's philosophy in terms of Bildung, see John Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2002, chapter 3. For Hegel, in his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Leibniz's scheme has become unpalatably outdated; still his discussion of Leibniz is interesting for picking out Leibniz's individualism.

remembered mainly as what was destroyed by Kant. Yet in its own day, it had its merits: although he was a theologian, he advocated philosophy based on rational demonstration, the independence of the philosophy faculty, and academic freedom.⁹ On top of that, he lectured in German, which was quite a novelty around 1710.

True, Wolff contributed little to the development of language study. (He considered it a metaphysical problem; that was remarkable enough. Jürgen Villers devotes a chapter to it.¹⁰) He is worth mentioning mainly because his logics, psychology and metaphysics defined a good deal of the philosophy curriculum in 18th century Germany. Thus Leibniz's idea of conceptual analysis was accommodated into *Schulphilosophie*, which in itself was by and large an attempt to fit contemporary philosophical/scientific thought to a scholastic structure.

Schlegel and the Romantic movement, however, were ill at ease with academic philosophy, whether it be dogmatic or critical. Kant and German Idealism meant a lot to them, but still it was perceived as yet another *Schulphilosophie*. (This may well be partly because it was not too much concerned with language.) Remarkably enough, the Romantics' debt is as much to enlightened, practical *Popularphilosophie* as it is to speculative, systematic philosophy. Romanticism, after all, wanted to liberate the people through Art; and both for the creation of a literary field, and the campaign for human rights and freedom, the contribution of popular philosophers like Lessing and Mendelssohn was all-important.

As John Zammito argues, the most important representative of *Popularphilosophie* and the German Enlightenment was Herder.¹¹ This is a disputable claim to make about the so-called 'father of the Romantics', but it makes it easier to see how Bildung can appear to be so enlightened and so romantic at the same sight. What makes the claim disputable is that Herder was a fierce critic of Western civilization, its colonial crimes, its idea of progress which merely served for self-flattery, and its seclusion in dry reason. (For this critique, open a page of *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* at random.) There is, then, a conflict between Enlightenment and Romanticism, only it isn't quite a cats and dogs tale. What Herder *represents* is difficult to say, not in the last place because he always quarrelled with everyone. He was, however, the first to make Bildung into a sort of *theory* that could be *propagated*, and his thought about language is an intrinsic part of this theory.

For Herder, language is not merely part of man's mind set, it is part of his fulfilment. Herder's not

⁹ For Wolff, see Zammito, *op. cit.*, chapter 2.

¹⁰ Jürgen Villers, *Kant und das Problem der Sprache. Die historischen und systematischen Gründe für die Sprachlosigkeit der Transzendentalphilosophy*, Reflexionen zur Sprachtheorie I, Verlag am Hockgraben, Konstanz 1997, chapter 3.4.2.3. In Villers' summary, Wolff was too much of a rationalist to identify language and thought outright, but still held that 'words without concepts are empty, but concepts without words are blind'.

¹¹ Zammito, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 11

quite so staggering insight is that we are what we are because of the accumulated effort of our forebears and fellows, and this can be only because we have language in which to communicate. The origin of language cannot lie in convention, because then we must convene on some point before we can communicate; but it is nonsense to call its origins divine, because that is to explain from the unexplicable. (If the origins were divine, how would we know they were?) It follows that language must originate from our common nature, that to express ourselves is the natural thing for human beings to do. And indeed, the first line of his essay on the Origin of Language goes: *Schon als Tier hat der Mensch Sprache*. In the first indistinct grunts, sighs, screams and calls there is already *eine Sprache der Empfindung, die unmittelbares Naturgesetz ist*.¹² Language, then, is essentially expressive; but it also *develops* with the growth and spread of mankind, as a bind to kinship relations. For Herder, Bildung is national Bildung, since we develop as part of a community, and it is historical, since we build on top of history's efforts. Now if this was the invention of nationalism, Herder was the first to put nationalism into perspective: first, every savage could have been us had he been born with us; second, we are not morally better because we are more advanced; and third, civilization was not developed by our nation on its own, it was relegated from one people to the other, Romans to Germans, Greeks to Romans, Asians and Egyptians to Greeks, and Asians to Egyptians.¹³ Behind Herder's nationalism, then, there is human equality, pacifism, and admiration for other cultures, even though he makes some unpleasant remarks about lazy ugly Negroes.

Herder's views on language were original enough to earn him a gold medal and instant fame. The fact that they *could* alone shows that 'the origins of language' were widely perceived to be a pressing problem; and indeed, Herder's prize essay won the Berlin Academy competition on that question, which was the last of *five* concerning language.¹⁴ An earlier one had been on the relation of language and thought. Herder's originality, then, is not in rousing the interest in language, and there is nothing new about his idea that reason depends on it. Equally, the idea that the origin of language is *expressive*, and its first manifestation is *poetic*, was a fairly common topic of debate, and the lingual perspective on *national character* was not Herder's invention. (Rousseau, for instance, had argued that 'Nordic' languages must have grown from needs and danger, and the Romance languages from love and affection.) Generally, Herder's model of language, reason and history is traced back to his teacher Hamann, who held that all creation is filled with the Word of God, which echoes all throughout history in human language and tradition.¹⁵ Herder, however, was not as theocentric as either Hamann

¹² Johann Gottfried Herder, *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*, in: *Herders Werke. Zweiter Band*, red. Regine Otto, Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker, Aufbau, Berlin/Weimar 1978, pp. 89-200; p. 92

¹³ *idem*, p. 197

¹⁴ Cordula Neis, *Anthropologie im Sprachdenken des 18. Jahrhunderts. Die Berliner Preisfrage nach dem Ursprung der Sprache (1771)*, *Studia Linguistica Germanica* 67, ed. Stefan Sonderegger & Oskar Reichmann, De Gruyter, Berlin/New York 2003, p. 90

¹⁵ Villers quotes a letter from Hamann to Herder to confirm this textbook history: 'Ihr Thema über Sprache, Tradition und Erfahrung ist meine Lieblingsidee, mein Ey, worüber ich brüte – mein Ein und Alles – die Idee der Menschheit und ihre Geschichte – das vorgesteckte Ziel und Kleinod unser gemeinschaftl. Freundschaft und

or Leibniz; he had a mildly deistic notion of the harmony of creation, but combined with the idea that man must cultivate his own garden. Language, and poetry first of all, is the expression of humanity.

With such principles, it is not surprising that Herder had a keen interest in India. A. Leslie Wilson, in his study of 'The ideal of India in German Romanticism', characterizes his attitude as one 'of extreme reverence and adulation which resulted finally in the formulation of a mythical image',¹⁶ although Herder had little else to rely on than travel literature. For the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, he could use the book by Mackintosh; but even before he had an up-to-date account at his disposal, Herder praised India as the cradle of mankind, where language, the alphabet and religion came from.¹⁷ (Herder also shared with Schlegel the quaint conviction that Norse sagas originated in India.)

While Herder was busy with the *Ideen*, William Jones founded the Asiatick Society of Calcutta, and the study of Sanskrit got serious. By the time Herder published the fourth volume and ended there, the work of Jones and company began to be translated into German. One of Herder's students made it into the Göttingen academy by studying and translating the work from Calcutta.

Since for Herder every expression of humanity has its merit, the existence of the Indian canon did not present a problem to him. He was not a classicist. Bildung at large is not a classicist ideal, even though the study of the classics is central to it – but Bildung is different from classical humanism in that it does not merely aim at imitation and emulation, it aims at creating a new world. The meanings of the classics, therefore, must be redefined: they continue to be morally imperative, only they are no longer imperative as an eternal model. For Herder, they were simply admirable; others were also. For the young Schlegel, reviewing the first two volumes of Herders *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*, this is not enough:

Das Resultat leugnet, daß die Poesie verschiedener Zeiten und Völker verglichen werden könne, ja sogar, daß es einen *allgemeinen Maßstab* der Würdigung gebe. Aber ist dieses auch erwiesen? – Wenn noch kein tadelloser Versuch, das Feld der Poesie einzuteilen, vorhanden sei, muß diese Einteilung darum überhaupt unmöglich sein? – Die Methode, jede Blume der Kunst, *ohne Würdigung*, nur nach Ort, Zeit und Art zu betrachten, würde am Ende auf kein andres Resultat führen, als das alles sein müßte, was es ist und war.¹⁸

What goes for poetry goes for culture at large – in fact *Poesie* is taken rather widely to mean *Kultur zum Schönen*.¹⁹ Now it seems rather odd to complain that an author is too impartial in his presentation

Autorschaft.' Villers, *op.cit.*, p. 247 ; his source is Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, Band IV, ed. Walther Ziesemer & Arthur Henckel, Frankfurt a.M. 1975

¹⁶ A. Leslie Wilson, *A Mythical Image; The ideal of India in German Romanticism*, Duke UP, Durham, NC 1964, p. 49

¹⁷ Wilson, *op.cit.*, pp. 50-1. His sources are *Auch eine Philosophie* and *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*.

¹⁸ KA II, pp. 47-55; p. 55

¹⁹ *idem*, p. 48

of other cultures, but Schlegel has a point. Herder's interest in poetry, after all, is *to promote humanity*. So if knowledge of it is morally relevant, what are the moral standards? Yet two centuries later, Schegel's *Über Sprache und Weisheit* is insavourable precisely because of its pedantic moral perspective. Schlegel's judgement on Herders *Briefe* lays bare one of the key problematics of the Bildung ideal: how to conceive of knowledge in moral terms without occluding it?

4. Changing the world philologically

The Bildung ideal, as it works in *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, is essentially a programme for changing the world and changing the minds first. Such ideas were not uncommon at the time. Ever since the French Revolution had gone sour, German intellectuals had argued that the true revolution of their times should be spiritual. Schiller's letters *Über die Ästhetische Aufbringung des Menschen* and the enigmatic '*Älteste Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus*' are the best-known early examples of it. The former argue that Man cannot be forced into reason and freedom, and cannot simply make the leap from nature to freedom; so Art is needed as an intermediate sphere, in which sense and intellect are equally appealed to. The latter states that Art should found a new religion, through which to unite the spirits and inspire the sciences, to join poetry and reason in a new mythology, truth and morals in beauty. In the same vein, Hölderlin sees the task of the German poets as reminiscence, now that the Greek gods are no longer present, and Schiller copes with the problem that poetry cannot be spontaneous and self-conscious at the same time. The scheme of cultural reform, then, is modelled on a Greek ideal; only the infancy of man cannot be recovered, the Greek *Heiterkeit* is beyond the horizon, and whereas the Greeks merely worshipped beauty, the Germans should worship Man through Art; in sum, the Germans should be the Greeks of their own time. Schlegel's own book on the study of Greek poetry is as much about the future and the present as it is about the past. But that was written in 1795.

In this early work, the word *Bildung* recurs every two pages or so. Beauty and freedom go hand in hand; and this is something the Greeks understood. The modern poets should contribute to the moral education of the nation as the Ancients did, and to this end we should learn to both understand the Classics and love them. But to be truly free, we must also understand the pursuit of knowledge from a transcendental perspective; to be free is to be a knowing and acting subject. Now is the moment, since Kant has written the Critique of Judgement and Fichte 'has discovered the foundations of transcendental philosophy',²⁰ that the Classics can be read in the light of pure free reason. Schlegel's idea of Bildung is linked, at this time, to Fichte's encompassing system of the sciences. The aesthetic principles, that were natural to the Greeks, can now be established on a rational basis. The modern perspective is an encompassing, 'political' one. Under this perspective, the moral, aesthetic and

²⁰ *Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie*, in: KA I: Studien des Klassischen Altertums, red. Ernst Behler, Schöningh, Paderborn 1979, pp. 217-367; pp. 357-8

intellectual judgement are on a par.²¹

By comparison, *Bildung* is remarkably absent from *Über Sprache und Weisheit*. So are the German poets. The German reading public is addressed as an audience, and the relations between German and Sanskrit are emphasized, but very little reference is made to the present. This was the year (1808) that Fichte held his *Reden an die Deutsche Nation*, and Wilhelm von Humboldt was commissioned with the reform of the Prussian system of education. (It was also the year of the *Concordat* and the *Code Napoleon*.) If Schlegel was still concerned with *Bildung* and social reform, why didn't he more explicitly say so? It wasn't that he was abroad: there was a lively German community in Paris, and Humboldt had been abroad for sixteen years. Schlegel's conversion had been something like a goodbye to Prussia and Saxony; after that, he lived mainly in Vienna. That meant, after 1808, that he sided with the Restoration – but still, someone that wants the study of Sanskrit to have as large an impact as classical humanism had is not a plain reactionary. In Germany, the impact of reading the Bible in Greek and Hebrew had been several wars and political fragmentation. Schlegel may not have meant to hint at this, but if he was dreaming of a second Renaissance, he knew damn well it would not be peaceful. What kind of future he was envisioning he did not bother his reader with.

But he has left some testimony of it. While he was working on *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, he made his living giving private courses, *Logik*, *Universalgeschichte*, *Entwicklung der Philosophie*. In the supplement to the *Logik*, he gives an evaluation of present philosophy which is very similar to his discussion of Indian cosmologies. In the last chapters of the other two, he vents out his ideas for the future. Here, his rejection of classical republicanism is unambiguous:

Der Name der Freiheit und der Schein desselben ist es, was an der Verfassung der Alten blendet. Dauerhafte und gesetzliche Freiheit ist nur bei der ständischen Verfassung möglich und fand auch im Mittelalter in einem viel höheren Grade statt als im Altertum. (...) Es ist höchst sonderbar, jene Republiken allein als freie Verfassungen anzusehen, wo der nützliche Bürgerstand so verachtet war wie in Athen und Rom und wo die republikanische Verfassung meist gleich anfangs eine merkantilische oder militärische Oligarchie war oder sehr bald darin ausartete. (...) Was ist die älteste Verfassung gewesen von jener Zeit an, da überhaupt Verfassung entstand und entstehen musste? Theokratie und Heroismus; Theokratie d.h. die Obergewalt der erleuchteten Menschheit über die rohe Menge; und Heroismus, als Gewalt, als Staatsform d.h. der natürliche Vorzug derjenigen, die ihr Leben für das allgemeine Beste aufopfern.

Wo diesen beide Elemente der wahren und göttlichen Verfassung fehlen, da tritt ein bloß natürliches Prinzip in die Verfassung ein, d.h. Anarchie oder Despotismus.²²

²¹ idem, p. 325: 'Alle diese [moralische, ästhetische und intellektuelle] Bestandteile sollen unter sich im Verhältnisse der *Gesetzesgleichheit* (Isonomie) stehn, und die schöne Kunst hat ein unveräußerliches Recht auf *gesetzliche Selbständigkeit* (Autonomie).'

²² *Vorlesungen über die Universalgeschichte*, KA XIV, red. Jean-Jacques Anstett, Schöningh, Paderborn 1960, iv.10, pp. 255-6

Whatever we may think of his political vision, the historical data are not inaccurate. Schlegel's rejection of the antique model is based on historical scrutiny: the Greek states, indeed, were war machines relying on slave industry. Such a state will not bring lasting peace. What Schlegel pleads for instead, is a mathematically ordered moral hierarchy, modeled on feudal Europe and the caste system. In the Kingdom come we shall all be equals; but before that we need a king to embody the will of the people, not a parliament to 'represent' it. We need an emperor to unite the different nations, and a religious caste, which is identical with that of the learned, to keep the worldly powers in check.²³

In this redemptionist view on history, *Bildung* is the characteristic of two distinct stages, antiquity and modern times. Both stages are necessary to prepare the world for the Kingdom of God, but both types of *Bildung* have a moral defect: the classical *Bildung* has only a faint echo of the original revelation, and in modern times it has not even that. Schlegel emerges as an early critic of disenchanted reason: modern times are not the lowest period, 'wohl aber die schlechteste und gefährlichste'.²⁴

For Schlegel, this universal history is not an obstacle to human freedom. The goal of *humanity* is the final Kingdom, but the goal of the *individual* is the highest good; the two should not be confused.²⁵ Every man is free to warrant his own *Seeligkeit*, and for this the final redemption is but a regulative idea. *Bildung* is empty if it does not include the aspiration for *Seeligkeit*. In one of the scarce remarks on *Bildung* in *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, Schlegel states that 'die heilige Schrift das eigentliche Band geworden ist, wodurch auch die europäische Denkart und Bildung an das orientalische Ältertum anknüpft'.²⁶

The ultimate goal is in the good itself, 'on which all morally educated people and common sense agree' - quite a Kantian style of reasoning. What Schlegel found amiss in Kantian philosophy, however, was a satisfactory notion of the highest good – and this critique of Kant is common to all Romantics. What, after all, makes the transcendental subject so self-sufficient? What is the point of following the categorical imperative and feeling free for that? Schlegel rejects the wish, 'alles auf eigene Kraft und Vernunft [zu] gründen', and he wants Oriental studies to counter the 'natural tendency' of man to believe himself the source of everything.²⁷ Neither does he have any good words for rational metaphysics: why compose 'den Begriff der Gottheit und den Beweis ihres Daseins aus Vernunftschlüssen, Wahrscheinlichkeiten der äußern Natur und inner Bedürfnissen oder Hindeutungen... da wir doch Gott schon erkannt haben müssen, um seine Spuren in der Natur und im Bewußtsein wieder zu finden'?²⁸ Revelation is not a spoken message, but *ein Aufgehen des innern*

²³ *Philosophische Vorlesungen. Zweiter Teil*, KA XIII, red. Jean-Jacques Anstett, Schöningh, Paderborn 1964, pp. 164-75

²⁴ *Vorlesungen über die Universalgeschichte*, iv.9, p. 250

²⁵ *Philosophische Vorlesungen. Zweiter Teil*, pp. 168-9

²⁶ *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, iii.4, p. 295

²⁷ *idem*, p. 303

²⁸ *idem*, ii.2, p. 207

Gefühls.

One thing that Schlegel sticks to in *Über Sprache und Weisheit* is that one needs to know philosophy in order to appreciate the depth of the Indian Wisdom. Only he doesn't make such references to Fichte and Kant as he made in *Über das Studium der Griechen*. Pure free reason, he now holds, declines into skepticism and then into empiricism. But idealism goes beyond this ratiocination: for him, it is 'jede Philosophie, die von dem Begriffe der selbsttätigen Kraft und lebendiger Wirksamkeit ausgeht'.²⁹ So he defines idealism in organicist terms. Under such a definition, the idealist philosophy of his day is not in conflict with Schlegel's religious vision: the fact that he believes reason to be *insufficient* does not make him a religious obscurantist. Only it takes a spark of revelation to save this philosophy from regression, and that is how the Orient has saved the western mind more than once.³⁰

It makes sense to compare the chapter on Indian philosophy with his *Kritik der Philosophischen Systeme*, the supplement to his logic course. In the latter, he makes a distinction between lower and higher systems of thought: materialism, empiricism and scepticism as against 'realism' or pantheism, 'emanation' or speculative mysticism, and idealism. Under 'realism' he understands all doctrines of a 'single, necessary, all-encompassing, unchanging, infinite being'³¹ such as Leibniz's, Spinoza's, and Schelling's – and all these he rejects outright, because if all is one there is no difference between good and evil, and so these doctrines are morally destructive. But this, together with materialism, is the only system that has no merits whatsoever. 'Emanation' here means the idea that all originates with God and will return to him. As a 'speculative mysticism', it includes supersensual experience, metempsychosis, and with that, the craving for purification from the world of sense.³² It is to be distinguished sharply from plain subjective mysticisms such as pietism and gnosticism, and also from pantheism because it inspires the highest moral excellency. It is not self-sufficient as a system of philosophy, but together with scepticism and empiricism it is the 'element or condition of a true and accomplished [idealist] philosophy'.³³ In other words, for Schlegel mysticism is not at odds with the scientific spirit, rather it is its indispensable counterpart.

Schlegel does not expect much from Indian *science*: he doesn't even think the Indian accomplishments in mathematics worth mentioning. The Indian wisdom that he is concerned with is cosmological. So in the chapter on Indian philosophy, he proceeds in the same vein as in the lectures (which were not published until 1836). He summarizes the Indian cosmology into four varieties, without much regard to the details – those weren't available in Paris, 1808 – and explaining them mainly in terms of ethical implications. He is tolerant in this regard to 'Seelenwanderung und Emanation', although it tends towards too much pessimism; and he applauds the doctrine of metempsychosis, although he thinks it more plausible morally than physically. 'Astrologie und wilde Naturdienst' is regressive because it

²⁹ idem, iii.4, p. 303

³⁰ idem, p. 305

³¹ *Philosophische Vorlesungen. Zweiter Teil*, p. 357

³² idem, pp. 364-70

³³ idem, p. 384

remains stuck to the natural realm, and so is the cause of human sacrifice and other sorts of barbarism. ‘Pantheism’ is rejected for the same reasons as before. With regard to Buddha, I Ching and the Vedanta’s, he judges that ‘Pantheismus ist das System der reinen Vernunft’,³⁴ that it marks the transition from Oriental to European thought, and that it gets even worse when it appears as ‘a more or less scientific system’, which it does already in its earliest forms. One senses he is attacking Schelling here rather than any Indian or Chinese. In Schlegel’s view, pantheism is the innate cancer of the philosophy of his day: ‘Avec Kant, vous l’entrevoiez déjà, Fichte est inévitable; mais avec Fichte il faut bien savoir que Schelling est inévitable aussi : la raison ne peut conduire qu’au panthéisme.’³⁵

He finds a better alternative to both pantheism and emanation in dualism, ‘die Lehre von zwei Prinzipien und der ewige Kampf des Guten und Bösen.’ There are some philosophical defects to it: if the two are eternally at war, then evil is the equal of good; if they are ultimately reconciled, the system is a covert pantheism. Still, as a religion of light, it is more favourable towards ‘Tat und Leben’ than the system of emanation and metempsychosis. It is the system to which ‘the most beautiful and lovely’ part of Indian mythology belongs, as well as the Persian religion in its uncorrupted form.³⁶ This mention of the Persians must be noted. In the chapter on language, Schlegel emphasizes the close relation between German and Persian; and in his historical ideas, he suggests that there might have been one original Indian tribe, of which the ‘German and Persian offspring has been particularly great’³⁷. This is where Schlegel comes close to inventing the ‘Aryan myth’.

But there is a more enlightened side to his views on history. First, in *Über Sprache und Weisheit* as well as in the *Universalgeschichte*, he declares the physical origin and diversity of races largely irrelevant to history, and so to moral judgement. In this regard, Genesis is only an allegory, and the question of homogenesis or polygenesis is of no moral consequence, because one is either human or not.³⁸ Second, he argues against the idea that earlier people were primitive. The Egyptian and Indian edifices ‘dwarf our present buildings’, and man was fully receptive to both reason and revelation from the earliest beginnings.³⁹ Third, there is no conflict between East and West in terms of civilization:

So wie nun in der Völkergeschichte die Asiaten und die Europäer nur eine große Familie, Asien und Europa ein unzertrennbares Ganzes bilden, so sollte man sich immer mehr bemühen, auch die Literatur aller gebildeten Völker als eine fortgehende Entwicklung und ein einziges immer fortgehendes Gebäude und Gebilde, als Ein großes Ganzes zu betrachten, wo denn manche einseitige und beschränkte Ansicht

³⁴ *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, ii.5, p. 243

³⁵ Victor Cousin, who made a grand tour of German thinkers in 1817, quotes Schlegel in his *Fragments et Souvenirs* forty years later; my source is the introduction to *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, p. CXXXVII

³⁶ *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, ii.4, pp. 229-31

³⁷ *idem*, iii.3, p. 275

³⁸ *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, iii.2, p. 267; *Universalgeschichte*, i.2; Herder, on the other hand, had explained moral characteristics from climate, and thought of negroes as half-apes. Schlegel does not really like Ethiopians, but they are human and capable of ‘Bildung’ all the same.

³⁹ *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, i.5, p. 169

von selbst verschwinden, vieles im Zusammenhänge erst verständlich, alles aber in diesem Lichte neu, erscheinen würde.⁴⁰

And in *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, this perspective includes even Jews and Chinese, although they are not part of the *language* family, and although he had declared both irrelevant to universal history in his lectures (the Jews because they are a minor tribe, China because it doesn't mingle with the rest of the world). Racial distinctions are not absolute, since tribes merge and split, and the inflexed languages may well have been imposed by conquering tribes which then merged with the aboriginal population.⁴¹ Even the distinction between two main types of language, the inflexed and the affixing/isolating, is not meant to 'elevate the one and denounce the other': the world of language 'is too rich and complex for that', and the art, virtue and power of Hebrew and Arab is beyond denial.⁴² The only *absolute* distinction is between the *organical* and *mechanical* nature of grammatical structures; but languages as they are can be hybrid. What it all comes down to, then, is whether a certain language structure grows naturally from *ein Aufgehen des innern Gefühls*, or whether it is the product of screaming, imitation, and then is made orderly by plain reasoning. The former type has a more natural beauty, designates and articulates clearly, but it is also vulnerable to decay, whereas the latter can only improve over time.⁴³

This seems to imply that there is no conflict between the Classical and the Oriental example, that the study of the one can only profit from the other. But of course, it *is* at odds with established conceptions of Classical Bildung. It is appropriate to ask, what has become of Schlegel's ideals from the time of *Über das Studium der Griechen*?

5. Romanticism and the religion of Art

After 1795, Schlegel was quickly cured of the idea of a 'rational aesthetics', and with that of his veneration for Fichte. By the end of the next year, he and Novalis were working on a philosophy in which there is no absolute truth, and every system is just an approximation.⁴⁴ We must think of a whole in so far that to think of an object as a unity requires this notion of a whole, but in so far that all knowledge refers to this 'whole' it is symbol, allegory, metaphor. (Which one, or any one? Unclear.) In line with that, there was a huge rise in esteem for the imagination, and Art could not exist within the boundaries of reason anymore. So the relation of classic to modern Art was redefined: now the Greeks

⁴⁰ idem, iii.4, p. 315

⁴¹ idem, iii.2, p. 269

⁴² idem, i.4, p.163. Still there is one rather sinister remark in his philosophical notebook over 1808-9: 'In den *Semitischen Sprachen* scheint eher ein Princip des Verderbens, der *Entartung* des Stillstehens zu liegen (die jüdische Sprache selbst) So daß *dieß* allerdings die *Sprache des FALLES sein könnte*, und die Amerikanische doch von d. URHEBRÄISCHEN abstammen.' *Gedanken [1808-9]*, in: KA XIX: Philosophische Lehrjahre II, ed. Ernst Behler, Schöningh, Paderborn 1971; nr. 88, p. 275

⁴³ idem, i.4-5

⁴⁴ Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung. Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1997, p. 520; see also chapter 21.

remained bound in an organic cycle of glory and decay, whereas modern Art was characterized by infinite progress.⁴⁵ Schlegel's famous theory of irony is also correlated: he defines it as a compound of *allegory*, which points to the highest without grasping it, and *wit*, which expresses both the aspiration and the awareness that it is unattainable.⁴⁶

Now one merit of his earlier approach towards Greek poetry had been to put it firmly in its historical context. When he set out to write his book on Greek poetry, he expressed the need for 'a Winckelmann of Greek poetry' and 'a Newton of history'; with such ambitions, the idea to regard the subject from a 'political' perspective – that is, as one constituent part of Greek society and culture – was not a bad try. Already then he had been grappling to reconcile the classical imitation of nature with modern invention, or cycle with progress, and with regard to history he followed the same strain: at that time, he felt that history was the *dialectics of nature and freedom*.⁴⁷ Moreover, he had been reading Kant critically, and concluded that the critical project to impose limits on reason was in fact a historical undertaking – so history was of philosophical relevance.⁴⁸ These principles were later subject to change, but the *integrative approach* from his first substantial work seems to be a constant. In *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, the perspective has become only more encompassing.

At this time Schlegel was an atheist. As said, this was quite extraordinary in his day, even with the Jena avant-garde; there was a scandal when Fichte was accused of being one. For Schlegel, there may have been some radical chic to it, but at any rate his views on history were more secular than Kant's or Herder's. In a sense, it was the Bildung ideal that brought him off this path. In the years between 1795 and 1800, the initially secular cult of Bildung developed into a full-scale religion, and then Schlegel applied for divine help. In the *Ideen*, appearing in the last volume of *Athenäum*, religion has taken the place of politics as the unifying principle:

[4] Die Religion ist die allbelebende Weltseele der Bildung, das vierte und unsichtbare Element zur Philosophie, Moral und Poesie, welches gleich dem Feuer, wo es gebunden ist, in der Stille allgegenwärtig wohltut, und nur durch Gewalt und Reiz von außen in furchtbare Zerstörung ausbricht.⁴⁹

This is exactly the sphere to which 'politics' applies in the earlier work. This notion of 'politics' itself, encompassing morals, aesthetics and 'the intellect', was more about Bildung than it was about power, and making it the first principle of judgement was already a large step towards deification. Then with the beginning of *Athenäum*, two years before the *Ideen*, the plan was to replace religion with Bildung:

[233] Die Religion ist meistens nur ein Supplement, oder gar ein Surrogat der Bildung, und nichts ist religiös in strengem Sinne, was nicht Produkt der Freiheit ist. Man kann also sagen, Je freier, je religiöser;

⁴⁵ Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Band I, p. XLVIII, and Band VIII, pp. LXIX-XXI

⁴⁶ Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die romantische Ästhetik. Vorlesungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1989, ch. 17

⁴⁷ Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Band VIII, p. LXXXVII-XCIX

⁴⁸ idem, pp. XXII-XXIX

⁴⁹ *Ideen*, in: KA II, pp. 256-272; p. 256

und je mehr Bildung, je weniger Religion.⁵⁰

Or more pointedly: ‘Gott werden, Mensch sein, sich bilden, sind Ausdrücke, die einerlei bedeuten.’⁵¹ But it is not so clear what kind of divinity is pointed to. In the very same fragments it is pointed out that knowing more also means knowing one’s ignorance better, that reason alone does not make one ‘learned’, and that transcendence is unattainable (frs. 267, 318, 388). The Absolute is not to be known, it is only to be *aspired for*, and so far it functions only as *regulative idea*, like Kant’s notion of teleology.

Yet there is a difference: the Absolute is conceived of as a *necessary condition of thought*.⁵² With Kant the ‘teleology’ that underlaid aesthetic judgement and inspired moral theory was not ‘transcendental’, could not attain the categorical status of laws of reason. Schlegel’s notion of the Absolute, on the other hand, imposes equal limits on morals, aesthetics and knowledge. Whereas for Kant art and beauty could not be of moral (or philosophical) consequence, because this would give nature authority over reason, for Schlegel the domains of human Bildung are united in their aspiration for the Absolute. Schelling took the drastic step of saying that Art is the true key to the self, because it unites action and reflection, whereas the various steps of reflection only make the self an object of knowledge. It ‘follows’ that Art is the manifestation of the Absolute. Schlegel does not follow him this far – he was quite sceptic of Schelling’s system-building from the beginning – but he *does* take over some parts of Schelling’s programme for an Art religion.

From replacing religion with Bildung, it was a small step to *merge* the two. The new religion, in the *Ideen*, is more a cult of Bildung than a cult of Art: or rather, it is a plan to rejuvenate the world through the *unity* of art and science. *Laßt die Religion frei, und es wird eine neue Menschheit beginnen!*⁵³ In the *Fragmente*, there had been talk of linking poetry and philosophy, considering the world as a work of art, making poetry a true art by doing it scientifically (frs. 451, 168, 255). Now in the *Ideen*, where the Orient first occurs in his writings, Schlegel wrote with even more pathos and less restraint:

[106] Nicht in die politische Welt verschleudere du Glauben und Liebe, aber in der göttlichen Welt der Wissenschaft und der Kunst opfre dein Innerstes in den heiligen Feuerstrom ewiger Bildung.

[111] Dein Ziel ist die Kunst und die Wissenschaft, dein Leben Liebe und Bildung. Du bist ohne es zu

⁵⁰ *Fragmente*, in: KA II, pp. 165-255; p. 203. These fragments inaugurated the journal, included contributions of Schleiermacher, Novalis, and A.W. Schlegel, and were presented anonymously, like a collective effort. Most of the journal was filled by the Schlegel brothers; it appeared twice a year, in sizeable volumes.

⁵¹ *idem*, nr. 262, p. 210

⁵² Unfortunately, Schlegel did not state this publicly in so many words. His philosophical notebooks became accessible only in the *Kritische Ausgabe*, after his wife and the war interrupted publication in 1807. I rely on Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, pp. 520-3 and ch. 36, who goes as far as to attribute to Schlegel a *coherence theory* of truth and knowledge.

⁵³ *Ideen*, nr. 7, p. 257. For an extensive discussion of the moral significance of aesthetics with Kant, Schelling, and others, see my earlier paper *De Kritik der Urteilskraft en het Bildungsideaal*. (2005, available on request).

wissen auf dem Wege zur Religion. Erkenne es, und du bist sicher das Ziel zu erreichen.⁵⁴

But this religion is still about aspiration for something indeterminate. God is not a meaningful ‘concept’, and atheism makes no sense only because theism doesn’t either. The gospel of this religion is *Bildung*, and its evangelists are the artists, who mediate to the people what they perceive of the divine within. The artists are a class of their own: they are the Brahmins, who must abstain from common life to consecrate themselves to work of universal significance. In the same issue, in the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, a Schelling-like character expresses the need for a ‘new mythology’ for the poets, so that they won’t have to start from zero time and again. (This is the *Rede über die Mythologie* mentioned above, in which ‘the true Romanticism must be sought in the Orient’.) And this mythology should include not only ‘what is good in the old mythologies’, but also modern physics and Spinoza. ‘In der Tat, ich begreife kaum, wie man Dichter sein kann, ohne den Spinoza zu verehren,’⁵⁵ it is said in all earnest. In the ensuing discussion, a Schleiermacher-figure suggests that all the sciences have a poetic element. In Schlegel’s world-view of 1800, everything that aims for the essence of reality is ‘art’ or ‘poetry’, and all philosophy, on the other hand, idealist. So art is not the ‘true organon or superior counterpart’ of philosophy, as in Schelling’s *Systemprogramm*: the two are ‘symmetrically opposed’⁵⁶ and complementary. But full *Bildung*, as *Idee* nr. 57 has it, is to be found in poetry, whereas philosophy is about ‘the depth of humanity’. The great task is to unite the two. It is Novalis, as a poet-philosopher, who is addressed in the last fragment of the *Ideen* with the elliptic remark: ‘Allen Künstlern gehört jede Lehre vom ewigen Orient. Dich nenne ich statt aller andern.’⁵⁷ With that, the new religion had a messianic figure and a promised country; and Schlegel himself would be the main apostle.

Thereafter everything went wrong. Schlegel became a doctor and taught philosophy at Jena, and it was a failure. Novalis died. The rest of the Romantic circle quarrelled, and *Athenäum* never appeared again. Schelling started his own journal together with Hegel, married the ex-wife of Schlegel’s brother (whom Friedrich had loved) and fell into a life-long writer’s block when she died. Schleiermacher, who had been the greatest advocate of religion in the movement, went to preach in a remote parish because people in Berlin thought he was an atheist. (He later translated Plato and became important at the Berlin university.) In short, they went the way of all avant-gardes: they assembled, manifested, lived together, stole each other’s girls, died young, quarrelled, scattered, and pursued a career.

So Schlegel went studying the Orient on his own, and Paris was the best place to do that. Initially, he went to study Persian; but in Paris there were 180 Sanskrit manuscripts, smuggled in from Persia forty years earlier, and Alexander Hamilton, a member of the Asiatic Society, now formally a prisoner of war. That was bait. Schlegel had been indomitable before he was twenty, and his elder

⁵⁴ idem, pp. 266-7

⁵⁵ *Gespräch über die Poesie*, p. 317

⁵⁶ *Ideen*, nr. 67, p. 262

⁵⁷ idem, nr. 156, p. 272

brother Karl August had died in India. So Friedrich was the right man in the right place. Five years later, there was *Über Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*.

In this later work, art seems to play a smaller role. There is one chapter on the origins of poetry, in which poetry is defined as a mix of wild and sweet, natural expression of feeling combined with fantasy and myth.⁵⁸ Yet there is nothing like a messianic role for the poet, or a scheme of aesthetic education. There is no talk of Indian pictural or plastic art, or of music. Still, the Indian language and wisdom are presented in aesthetic terms, and no philosophy can do without feeling – so it is not far-fetched to say that he is still dreaming of a unifying mythology, one that is poetical as well as philosophical, natural and ideal at the same time. But the lead role is now for history: on a scheme in his philosophical notebooks, history is in between *Poesie (Mythologie)* and *Philosophie*, and written in capitals, as the synthesis of the two. This HISTORY, of course, is ‘universal history’.⁵⁹

If the question whether art and beauty are morally imperative hinges on whether nature is a ‘moral source’, then it is likely that Schlegel still clings to some idea of aesthetic education. His plans for changing the world philologically would make no sense if he didn’t. But on the whole, there is more sense to his diagnosis of German Idealism and Romanticism than to the suggested cure. It is clear that Schlegel has not lost his concern for aesthetics, no matter what place it occupies exactly in his new cosmology. I suppose the idea is that poetry ‘opens the inner feeling’, and therefore is essential to moral education. But the text that we have does not settle the matter.

This may not be the issue that decides whether the book advocates a kind of Bildung ideal or not. But since both the Bildung ideal and aesthetic education are not explicitly avowed, and not absent either, we cannot stick to the author’s testimony. To read *Über Sprache und Weisheit* as an attempt to redefine Bildung, therefore, is to reconstruct some ‘underlying structure’, to make it coherent in a way that may not be true to Schlegel’s view. Likewise, to call it an ‘outcrop’ of Bildung suggests that there is some mechanism at work behind Schlegel’s development, which comes close to making the ideal have the man instead of the man having an ideal.

What it all comes down to, then, is what ideals *are*, and how they *work*.

6. The dark side of Bildung?

I am not looking for the man who corrupted Germany. A case can be made in defence of the Romantics, I suppose: arguing that the movement is not really a ‘counter-Enlightenment’, as Isaiah Berlin has called it; or showing that the Romantic position is based on very real problems and philosophically interesting, as Manfred Frank is doing; or pointing out how they anticipate 20th-

⁵⁸ *Über Sprache und Weisheit*, pp. 259-61

⁵⁹ *Zur Philosophie [1805 II]*, in: KA XIX; nr. 542, p. 147. These three make the middle column. On the left wing are Theologie, Philologie, Jurisprudenz; Rhetorik, π [Poesie], Musik; on the right, Pictur, Plastik, Architektur; Mathematik, Physik, Medicin; all in columns of three.

century critiques of reason, such as Weber's 'disenchantment', Horkheimer's 'totemism' or even Heidegger's 'Seinsvergessenheit'; or simply doubting the assumption that the horrors of the two World Wars happened because the Romantics indoctrinated the whole wide world, or because Germans read too much poetry at school. But that is not what this paper is about, and I certainly do want to defend Schlegel's 'caste system' or his division of organic and mechanical languages. Schlegel's views behind *Über Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, I think, must be *explained* rather than *defended*.

Schlegel's earlier ideas are relevant in this regard not only because they chart the man's development, define the Bildung ideal more sharply, and show what kind of ideas can go together with it. They also give a clue to what the Romantics did to the notion of Bildung. Before them, it had been a term with mainly positive connotations, which applied to people and a social group sharing certain characteristics. Herder had used it to describe the natural impulse of mankind towards self-improvement. In the sense that it was a state to be aspired to, it was already an ideal. But it was not a revolutionary ideal: this kind of Bildung abides in the silence of the law. Only with the Romantics Bildung became an *ideology*, a programme for changing the world.

This is not what people associate Bildung with nowadays. As it worked out, the Bildung reform only reinforced the Prussian state, and the Bildung ideal that Heine, Nietzsche, Mann and Heidegger grew up with can rightfully be called 'unpolitical' in some aspects. But with the Bildung ideal came education for the people, the integration of research in a teaching institution, the emergence of new fields of science, new jargons, and professional philosophy to unite all science under its wings. No one got guillotined because of the Bildung reform, but the silent changes it effected were tremendous. (I do not mean to suggest they were all for the better.) Humboldt may have been made fun of in Athenäum, and he did not enjoy such freedom to speculate when it came to creating and changing institutions, but what he did was closer to the early Romantic spirit than how it worked out in the end.

All the more reason, then, to ask what the ideal of Bildung *is*, and how it *works*. Or more generally, what *ideals* are and what they do. I will deal with this topic extensively in my thesis; but for the time being, Friedrich Schlegel presents an interesting case in point.

After having spent so many pages on Schlegel's views on language, history, divine provision and India, it may come as a surprise that I do not find any of these very interesting, or relevant, as philosophical reflections. They are valuable enough from a historical perspective, and they provide some funny anecdotes, but there is no challenge in arguing for or against any of them. Still it is not merely 'interesting' to see what the concern of the pioneer linguist were, what kind of problems India presented to him, what role language and history play in the emergence of the human sciences, and how the idea of divine provision informs the notion of Bildung. All this is *philosophically* challenging as an attempt to fit knowledge to a moral scheme. The *real* problem is what I have earlier called the 'moralization of knowledge'.

Few people would say that knowledge has no ethical relevance, but at the same time Schlegel's attempt to make his philological knowledge fit a moral scheme seems to distort rather than increase it. (Bopp made a better job with less morals.) Now Schlegel had a good point in arguing against Herder that it is nonsense to call things morally relevant without imposing moral standards. One could reply that knowledge is an 'ethical', but not a 'moral' affair – in plain words, that it belongs to 'the good life' without telling us what to do in a given situation – but this is begging the question. The moralization of knowledge is an open problem.

This explains my interest in ideals within systems of knowledge. The ideal of Bildung is not part of the ordinary philosophy curriculum, and I doubt if it can be called a 'philosophy' proper. If so, it is in a sense of the word 'philosophy' which is not quite the independent academic discipline emerging together with it. It is not a metaphysical puzzle, but rather a type of philosophy infected with reality, or even reality infected with philosophy.

I do not think the problem is particular to the 'human sciences' only. The Romantics didn't either. We have seen the young Schlegel talk of physics as poetry, and haul in Leibniz and Spinoza. Bildung may be associated with humanism and the humaniora, but Fichte hardly ever talks about language, history, or art and he was a great source of influence for the Bildung reform all the same. Not to mention Kant. Only the 'human sciences' (which is quite an anachronistic term to use in this regard) have human action for their subject matter and so they have a harder time separating factual and moral issues. When linguistics proved to be fertile for lawlike descriptions, this also meant it became less of a 'moral' science.

Some of Schlegel's views can be explained from the problem at hand. This does not mean there is anything *necessary* about Schlegel's development: it merely means it gives him some reasons. It was obvious enough at the turn of the century that the French Revolution did not work out as planned, that Kant's philosophy was not conclusive, and that science alone was not enough. Schlegel saw his faith as the only cosmology which could warrant human freedom, when all kinds of scientific and speculative world views led inexorably to pantheism or materialism. Similar arguments were propounded by Fichte and Schelling for *their* versions of divine providence and revelation, both of which Schlegel rejected. I do not think this 'proves' that Bildung is essentially a religious notion; rather, I think this is an instrumental use of religious phrases which is quite unconvincing. It may be convenient to profess doctrines like 'self-realization' or 'the moralization of knowledge' with an appeal to some higher order or benevolence, but even when you believe in that it is not a compelling argument.

One insight of twentieth-century philosophy has been that knowledge is 'normatively structured', and that this is so because it involves the competent use of words. Another has been that knowledge is not empirically or inferentially given but that it is woven into a 'web of belief'. I do not have such trust in Wittgenstein, Sellars, or Quine as Rorty has, but I think it makes sense to consider the ideal of Bildung

anew in the light of these developments, and to ask whether ideals play a role in holding together this web of norms and beliefs. The Romantic aspect of Bildung is not entirely something to get rid of. Few people do *not* believe, nowadays, that knowledge is continually in progress. In this regard, Manfred Frank may not be too anachronistic in attributing to the young Schlegel a ‘coherence theory of truth and knowledge’,⁶⁰ and the *Athenäum Fragment* nr. 267, when we take it not too mystically, has only become more actual with the steady increase of knowledge production:

‘Je mehr man schon weiß, je mehr hat man noch zu lernen. Mit dem Wissen nimmt das Nichtwissen in gleichem Grade zu, oder vielmehr das Wissen des Nichtwissens.’

Amsterdam, December 2005 – January 2006

⁶⁰ *Unendliche Annäherung*, pp. 522-3